



The AAFP Federal Key Contact Program

AAFP State Government Relations

The AAFP Federal Key Contact Program is an organized, proactive and strategic grassroots advocacy program. The purpose of the program is to build a strong on-going relationship with key congressional members in positions important to the policy goals and objectives of the academy. The success of any advocacy program depends on the involvement and support of its grassroots network. For the program to be successful, the Government Relations Division relies heavily on information provided at the chapter level in the search for key contacts. This document will assist chapters in understanding the program, the selection criteria for AAFP Key Contacts and the important role of chapters.

Long term, the Government Relations Division envisions a physician member in a strong a one-to-one relationship with a single legislator in Congress. This physician is the legislator's Key Contact. Short-term, the division is committed to match one family physician member to each legislator on strategic Congressional committees. These committees deal with legislation and policy having the greatest impact on our members such as Medicare/Medicaid, medical malpractice reform, Title VII funding, GME and Pay for Performance.

Strategic congressional committees include:

<u>Senate</u>	<u>House</u>
Finance	Ways and Means
Health, Education, Labor & Pensions (HELP)	Energy and Commerce
Appropriations	Appropriations
Labor/Health and Human Services	Labor/Health and Human Services

Appointments to congressional committees are relatively stable, changing every two years at the start of a congressional session; following an election if a member of the committee is not re-elected or chooses not to run; when a member is moved or assigned to another committee; or in extenuating circumstances when a congressional legislator resigns or dies. Congressional committee appointments can last several years. Each senator and representative holding a position on a strategic committee has an academy member serving as a Key Contact.

Selecting a Key Contact

First and foremost, a Key Contact must be a constituent of the legislator. Additional attributes for Key Contacts include:

- Interest in the advocacy process
- Dedication to family medicine and patients
- Desire for success of the AAFP/profession

Key Contacts are members who have expressed an interest in the political process. Others have been added based on the recommendation of their colleagues and still others have been selected upon state chapter recommendations. The Government Relations Division also may have direct experience with members through service on AAFP commissions and committees or prior attendance and participation at the Family Medicine Congressional Conference as a state chapter representative.

Key Contacts: Goals and Objectives

The AAFP Key Contact Program has a set of goals and objectives that the AAFP Board of Directors strongly supports. Key Contacts have five primary goals. They are to:

- provide a direct avenue to legislators who affect public policy decisions,
- localize and personalize the political impact of legislation,
- heighten the legislator's accountability to his/her constituents,
- reinforce the messages expressed on Capitol Hill by the AAFP leadership and staff, and
- represent the family medicine profession to key federal legislators.

Key Contacts accomplish these goals by completing a series of objectives. These objectives are:

- Develop an ongoing, personal constituent relationship with their legislator based on mutual trust and respect,
- Build community understanding and support for the profession and its position on the issues,
- Reinforce the constituent-legislator relationship through regular communication about professional issues of interest to the legislator.

Individuals in the key contact program are expected to:

- Know their legislator's political background, issue priorities, and committee assignments
- Be aware of pending federal legislation that may affect the profession
- Be prepared to discuss the impact on the member's own practice, patients, and community
- Stay abreast of AAFP policies and positions in order to carry the AAFP messages directly to the legislator
- Respond immediately to *Action Alerts* from the AAFP by contacting the legislator on the specified issues
- Be available for Washington "fly-in" events when necessary
- Upon invitation, participate in the annual Family Medicine Congressional Conference
- Build a relationship with the legislator and his/her staff, meeting with them when he or she is in the district
- Create an identity and image in the legislator's mind
- Organize, participate in or attend fundraising events for the legislator

- Communicate the AAFP message to Congress promptly and regularly by the best available means, upon request of the Academy, not limited to those issues that directly affect the member

It is equally important to build an open relationship with the Government Relations staff team to provide feedback on the issues a key contact discusses with the legislator. Feedback must be timely. This feedback is important to the academy staff in the development of a comprehensive and consistent legislative strategy.

Benefits of Becoming a Key Contact

Understanding the benefits of being a Key Contact are as important as understanding the requirements. When chapters approach a member about participating as a Key Contact, it will be helpful to understand all components of the program in order to establish clear expectations for the member who may become involved.

Key Contacts gain valuable knowledge from Washington insiders about legislation affecting their patients and their profession. Key Contacts meet with their legislator and discuss their priorities for health care legislation. Key Contacts also learn effective techniques for communicating with legislators and influencing public policy.

Upon invitation, Key Contacts participate in the annual *Family Medicine Congressional Conference*. Each spring, the Government Relations Division invites the Key Contacts to participate in a grass roots lobbying event that carries the AAFP message to Congress. Selection of participants is based on which Congressional legislators in strategic positions would benefit from a direct and personal visit by a constituent in Washington to discuss health care policy. This three day event is fully supported by the AAFP leadership.

The Role of Chapters

Once the Government Relations Division has identified an individual as a potential Key Contact for a particular legislator, staff then shares this information with state chapter executives. Chapter executives represent the most direct link in understanding the ability of a member to successfully fill the role. In making recommendations, chapters should understand the obligations that come with recognition as an AAFP Key Contact as well as the benefits.

Key Contacts are better prepared to be politically active on the state as well as federal level. Chapters can effectively leverage the knowledge and education provided to Key Contacts to enhance their own advocacy programs at the state level.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Our chapter has three key contacts but only one was invited to attend the Family Medicine Congressional Conference. Why?

A: The Government Relations Division looks at the policy issues being addressed and determines which legislators would most benefit from a constituent visit. Once the legislators are identified, staff reviews the key contact database in an effort to match a constituent to a legislator. These are the Key Contact physicians invited to attend the FMCC.

Q: Our chapter would like to send a representative to attend the FMCC. Is the conference only limited to Key Contacts?

A: No, the FMCC is open to a limited number of chapter participants. Chapters are provided a notice in advance of the meeting. Participation is, however, limited to 20 non-key contact chapter representatives and participation is on a first-come first-served basis.

Q: How can we appropriately share concerns regarding a Key Contact?

A: Any concerns you have regarding a Key Contact should be addressed to the Government Relations Division staff in Washington.

Q: Can chapter executives or staff attend the FMCC?

A: Yes. Chapter executives and staff have participated in the past. However, we are limited to twenty total chapter representatives with a goal to have as many members as possible experience the conference. The Government Relations Division works with registration to ensure within reason that those who desire to attend will be able to do so.

Q: Is there a fee to attend?

A: There is no registration cost for those attending. However, the AAFP provides financial support only for invited Key Contacts. Chapter members and staff are responsible for covering the costs associated with attending the conference such as airfare, hotel, and per diem.

For more information about the Key Contact program; contact the Government Relations Division in Washington, DC.